

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1. **(currently amended):** ~~A composition comprising, as an essential component thereof, a biologically pure culture of a~~An isolated lactic acid bacterial strain belonging to the genus *Lactococcus* ~~and, wherein the bacterial strain is *Lactococcus garvieae* and the bacterial strain has an ability to utilize at least one daidzein compound selected from the group consisting of daidzein glycosides, daidzein, and dihydrodaidzein to produce equol.~~

2. **(canceled).**

3. **(currently amended):** The isolated lactic acid bacterial strain belonging to the genus *Lactococcus* ~~composition according to Claim 2~~Claim 1, wherein said lactic acid bacterial strain ~~belonging to *Lactococcus* which is *Lactococcus garvieae* 20-92 deposited under FERM BP-10036.~~

4. **(currently amended):** A~~The composition comprising the isolated lactic acid bacterial strain belonging to the genus *Lactococcus* according to Claim 1 further comprising and~~ at least one member selected from the group consisting of daidzein compounds and daidzein compound-containing ingredients.

5. **(original):** The composition according to Claim 4, wherein the daidzein compound-containing ingredient is soybean flour or soy milk.
6. **(original):** The composition according to Claim 4 which is in the form of a beverage or a milk product.
7. **(original):** The composition according to Claim 4 further comprising equol.
8. **(original):** The composition according to Claim 7 which is in the form of a fermentation product of soy milk.
9. **(withdrawn-currently amended):** A method of producing equol comprising the step of letting ~~a biologically pure culture of~~ an isolated lactic acid bacterial strain belonging to the genus *Lactococcus*, wherein the bacterial strain is *Lactococcus garvieae* and the bacterial strain has an ability to utilize a daidzein compound to produce equol, act on at least one member selected from the group consisting of daidzein compounds and daidzein compound-containing ingredients.
10. **(canceled).**

11. (withdrawn-currently amended): The method according to Claim ~~9~~¹⁰ wherein said isolated lactic acid bacterial strain belonging to the genus *Lactococcus* is *Lactococcus garvieae* 20-92 deposited under FERM BP-10036.

12. (withdrawn): The method according to Claim 9, wherein the daidzein compound-containing ingredient is soybean flour or soy milk.

13. (currently amended): ~~A~~ An isolated lactic acid bacterial strain belonging to the genus *Lactococcus* as deposited under FERM BP-10036.

14. (new): A composition comprising an isolated lactic acid bacterial strain belonging to *Lactococcus garvieae* and an edible or pharmaceutically acceptable carrier.